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**Online Education and the Need for Professional Development Training  
for Online Faculty at Community Colleges**

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for Online Faculty at Community Colleges**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friend Christy, the sister I never had. If it were not for you, I would not have had this opportunity. I cannot thank you enough for being my support system and encouraging me throughout this program. I am so blessed and grateful to have you in my life.

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## **Abstract**

# **Online Education and the Need for Professional Development Training for Online Faculty at Community Colleges**

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With the growing number of courses and degrees being awarded online, there was considerable interest in online education among institutions of higher education. Due to the paucity of research on the needs of online community college faculty, this dissertation provided an introduction to the issues community colleges faced in providing professional development training to faculty who taught online. The following three research questions were used to examine community college faculty's perceptions about the professional development training they received to teach online courses: What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses? What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses? What are community college faculty members' expectations for being ready to teach online classes? It also includes a literature review on online education in U.S. post-secondary institutions, the role community colleges have played in online

education, the attitudes that faculty have had towards online education, the changing roles online faculty would have to adapt to in order to navigate from the traditional classroom to online, and institutional support. This study took place at an urban community college located in Texas. A qualitative research method was used to interview eight full-time faculty with at least three years online teaching experience from the Government Department only. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The data collected reflected the voices of online faculty and their professional development needs to effectively develop their courses. It also explored the challenges of faculty who teach online courses with an emphasis on the quality of training and support provided by colleges for faculty to develop and maintain their online courses. With the increased demand for online courses professional development need is urgent in order for colleges to meet the growing demand.



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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Online education is important because the number of students enrolling in online courses “has increased at rates far excess of the growth of overall higher education enrollments” (Allen, Seaman, Lederman & Jaschik, 2012, p. 3). Higher education online courses is a concept that continues to become increasingly popular and is not going away any time soon. Colleges are developing new strategies to increase the number of online sections and even offer entire degrees online. This study explored the need for developing quality online programs and providing faculty professional development in community colleges where training is limited.

According to Fish and Wickersham (2009), the distance learning is here to stay as a formal delivery mode of education and “the ivory tower as it was once known has not firmly established itself as a digital one” (p. 283). There will continue to be a need for more trained online faculty; however, change is always difficult and many faculty prefer teaching face-to-face instruction and have a reason to resist teaching completely online (Fish & Wickersham, 2009). Community college online course enrollment “account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years” so community colleges need to allocate the right amount of resources and planning for this mode of instruction (Allen, Seaman, & Sloan, 2007, p. 1).

These new changes will require faculty to learn new technological skills to develop, design, and improve their online courses (Fish & Wickersham, 2009). According to researchers, online course have left many faculty concerned with the

amount of workload required to develop those online course (Smidt, McDyre, Bunk, Li, & Gatenby, 2014). Faculty will also have to think about their roles differently as the “teacher, learner, and technical supporter” for the online class (Fish & Wickersham, 2009, p. 283).

Distance education is leading higher education growth and the numbers are continuing to grow annually (Allen et al., 2007). Community colleges in particular “have embraced online education to a greater extent than four-year universities” (Straumsheim, 2016, para. 9). However, faculty have not expressed as much optimism about online education (Allen et al., 2012). It is important for professional development training for faculty to examine faculty pedagogy techniques and “faculty attitudes” related to online education in order to help faculty successfully transition to the online environment (Smidt et al., 2014, p. 204).

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As community colleges move towards offering more classes online and even offering complete degrees online, it is very important that professional development training for faculty who have to develop and teach online course be offered. Colleges are facing numerous “changes in funding allocation challenges, students demand for instructional convenience, and institutional requirements to raise program completion rates have contributed to an increase in online courses offerings” (McGee, Windes, & Torres, 2017, p. 331). It is important for the community college, the departments, administrators, and technological instructional design specialists to understand what is currently being offered to faculty and that it is quality content that will help improve their

online course. In addition, it is important to evaluate from the faculty's perspective what training is working and what changes and improvements need to be made to the professional development training to help faculty with online sections (Walters, Grover, Turner, & Alexander, 2017). The literature has indicated that professional development is needed, but there is a gap in the literature regarding how best to prepare faculty and what type of training is most effective for the growing population of community college faculty teaching in an online environment.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to understand community college faculty members' perception of the professional development training they received in order to be able to teach online courses. Self-efficacy theory was utilized to explore the experiences community college faculty have had teaching online course and their perceptions about the resources they needed in order to be prepared to teach their online courses.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were used to examine community college faculty's perceptions about the professional development training they received to teach online courses at an urban community college located in Texas.

1. What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses?
2. What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses?

3. What are community college faculty members' expectations for being ready to teach online classes?

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative study was performed to explore the overall perceptions held by online full-time faculty regarding the efforts of their institutions of higher education to provide professional development training in order to help full time faculty to develop and teach online course at their community college.

This study took place at an urban community college located in Texas. The researcher distributed a pre-interview survey to all full time faculty. The full time faculty participants were from one departmental subject within the community college: the Government Department. The Government Department was chosen because both United States government and Texas State and local government courses are part of the core curriculum in Texas. A total of 16 full time faculty responded to the pre-interview survey. The pre-interview survey results helped the researcher select potential faculty participants. The researcher then sent out a recruitment email to the list of potential participants and selected eight participants that met the requirements to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The participants were required to be all full-time faculty who had been teaching online courses for at least three years. The researcher wanted faculty to have experience teaching online for at least three years in order to be able to share their insights with the researcher. Data was collected from the semi- structured interviews and were transcribed and coded.



## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

There are many terms used in higher education pertaining to distant learning courses that can lead to confusion. The research in this study was referencing the online delivery mode. The following are definitions to provide clarity between the different types of delivery mode classifications:

**The Learning Management System** – Software that enables educational institutions to create and manage lessons, courses, tests, videos, assignments, and many other types of learning activities for students (Blackboard, 2020).

**Online** – “A courses where most or all content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 4).

**Traditional** – “Course with no online technology used, content is delivered in writing or orally” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 4).

**Web Facilitated** – “Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 4).

## **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

Considering the limited geographic scope of this study, the researcher acknowledged the limitations and delimitations pertinent to this study. This study was a qualitative research study designed to understand the faculty professional development training needs to teach online courses and the results may not be applicable to all programs. The study participants were full-time faculty with experience teaching online courses for at least three years at the community college level and the study did not evaluate part-time adjunct faculty. The study participants were selected from one

discipline of study, government, within the community college located on more than one campus across the urban region. The study participants were selected without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, or age. There is possible researcher bias because the researcher is an employed full-time faculty member at a community college. The researcher has received some professional development training to teach online courses and has taught online courses at two community colleges. The researcher took steps to minimize these potential biases.

#### **ASSUMPTIONS**

The premise of this study was based on the assumption that online courses are here to stay and the number of sections will continue to increase at the community college. With the continued expansion and growth of the college, faculty are asked to be prepared to teach multiple online sections to allow for students to earn an associate degree online in each of the various disciplines offered by the community college. Therefore, more and more faculty will be needed to teach online courses. Well-designed professional development training for faculty to be able to teach all those courses online will be critical to the growth of the college.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study sought to examine the professional development preparation of full-time faculty at an urban community college in Texas to teach online courses. The study's findings aided colleges by advancing knowledge about the best practices in professional development training for faculty teaching online course. It also helped fill in some of the

gaps in the literature about the effective ways to help community college faculty who want professional development training to further develop and become better instructors.

Furthermore, this study could help full-time faculty who have not yet begun teaching courses online. Moreover, this study is valuable to adjunct faculty teaching at community colleges because in some departments, adjunct faculty are not given the chance to teach online course due to seniority selection. This study can help them gain insight and start preparations for the potential teaching of online course due to the increase of courses offered by the community colleges. Additionally, this study will benefit college administrators, deans, and department chairs to provide the resources and tools to help their faculty members be prepared to teach online courses.

## **SUMMARY**

In chapter one, the researcher discussed the statement of problem facing community colleges. Community college faculty professional development is needed to keep up with the growing demands of online courses being offered in community colleges. As more and more students turn to obtaining their entire degree online, faculty will have to participate in quality professional training to develop their courses and learn how to engage with students online as they would in a face-to-face setting. The chapter also discussed the purpose of the study, the research questions, the methodology, definition of terms, limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and significance of the study. The next chapter will discuss the literature review.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The review of the literature includes a background on online education, online education in community colleges, online faculty with a specific look at faculty attitudes, and the changing roles of faculty teaching online courses as compared to face-to-face courses. Furthermore, the important role of faculty professional development was explored to examine whether adequate training was provided for online faculty. Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) pointed out that there is a lack of research on what type of professional development faculty need; therefore, most trainings are created from “assumptions” that resulted in professional development that did not adequately prepare faculty to transition to online teaching (p. 29). As a result, the training and resources that are provided have not seen the level of success in getting faculty prepared to teach online courses (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Professional development training for online courses is critical because online courses require continued training in order to keep up with current trends, and a review of institutional support and resources for online learning will be addressed to examine whether training is adequately provided for online faculty.

### **ONLINE EDUCATION IN THE U.S. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

Online education beginnings conceptually date back over 100 years to Great Britain in “correspondence work” offered by institutions (Hickey, 2014, para. 1). Correspondence courses were a process where information exchange between instructor and student would be sent using the postal mail system (Bower & Hardy, 2004). According to Bower and Hardy (2004), correspondence courses were not reliable because students faced many challenges in having to wait long periods of time in order to receive

their course work materials and assignments pending the postal system did not lose the course materials in the process. Therefore, technology innovations improved distance education and led to many changes including courses being offered through “radio transmissions and audio recordings” (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 7). Community colleges were ahead of the curve by using the innovations of the time to provide education and access to students who otherwise had no other option of obtaining an education (Baker, Dudziak, & Tyler, 1994). As one form of technology advances and replaces the other, the Internet is the current dominant tool colleges use to offer their distance learning courses to students (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Each of the online course offerings by various colleges led to competition to attract students who wanted to successfully obtain their degree online (Adams, 2007).

State budgets over the years have reduced funding for community colleges and universities, which can lead to colleges having to make up for the shortfall by relying on raising tuition and other cost cutting measures (Mitchell, Leachman, & Saenz, 2019). In order to deal with state budget reductions many institutions of higher education “have looked to distance education, particularly online education, as the primary method for reaching more students while lowering instructional costs” (Neely & Tucker, 2010, p. 17). However, colleges still have to keep in mind other costs that will have to be factored in related to the development of online course (Neely & Tucker, 2010).

Online education has seen tremendous student growth over the years from “754,000 in 1995 to 1.6 million students in 1998” (Lei & Gupta, 2010, p. 616). According to Allen et al. (2007) “almost 3.5 million students took at least one online

course during the fall 2006 term” (p. 1). This “9.7 percent growth rate in online enrollments far exceeded the 1.5 percent growth of the overall higher education student population” (Allen et al., 2007, p.1). In the fall of 2017, over six million students were enrolled in online courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Public institutions of higher education have initially taken the lead in online enrollments compared to for-profit institutions offering online enrollment (Allen et al., 2007). All institutions of higher education have seen significant growth in online learning with community colleges having the largest number of students enrolled overall, totaling “over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 1).

Institutions of higher education have become aware that distance learning is altering instructional delivery for students by removing or reducing barriers that existed so students can gain more access to education and take an online course when it fits their schedule from the comfort of their own home (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Allen et al. (2007) indicated that the number one reason why higher education institutions are offering more online courses is to provide students with more access. According to Allen et al. (2007), other benefits of higher education include institutions being able to provide online instruction as an option to strategically help increase degree completion. Ironically, colleges and universities have not cited the lower costs of online instruction as one of the primary benefits (Allen et al., 2007). Institutions of higher education are using online education as a strategy to increase continuing education and accessibility to students (Allen et al., 2007).

Online courses compared to face-to-face courses, can broaden the reach for diverse student populations from other “geographic regions” in the state, county, or other counties around the world and from “geographically isolated” regions that otherwise could have not provided such services (Lei & Gupta, 2010, p. 617). Other benefits to online courses are that they open up more seats in the classroom allowing instructors to provide more time to individual students, and allowing traditional face-to-face courses to go to students who have the time to do so compared to non-traditional students who do not have that flexibility (Lei & Gupta, 2010). In addition, distance education courses could reduce the need to add new physical infrastructures thus potentially saving colleges money that could instead be used to invest in the various technological needs to provide online courses (Matthews, 1999).

Amirault (2012) describes pressures placed on institutions of higher education for change is not only coming from “external” forces because of the advancements of new technologies but also from “internal” forces (p. 255). Students demand an increased use of technology in their educational experiences even from traditional students who desire to take some portion of their courses in an online format (Amirault, 2012). With the ability now to offer entire degree programs through online courses, institutions of higher education are facing challenges to maintain the higher education experience (Amirault, 2012). Next, the researcher looked at specific characteristic of online education at the community college level.

## **Online Education in Community Colleges**

Great emphasis for online courses exists in the community college's mission to be responsive and flexible for non-traditional student populations who need colleges to take into consideration external factors, such as work and family life balance, as a foundation to a student's success (Sandford, Belcher, & Frisbee, 2007). Community colleges have always been transformational and flexible, keeping pace with the changing environment and advancing technology. As society has changed with the advancement in technology, students are coming to community colleges with the expectation that they will have access to class materials and other resources digitally and that technology will be incorporated in to their curriculum (Hachey, Conway, & Wladis, 2013). Community colleges have responded to these technological changes by providing online education courses to meet the student's educational and lifestyle needs (Hachey et al., 2013).

Community colleges today cater to a diverse student body, such as students who are older and have families and students who are working (Hachey et al., 2013). Community colleges also take the lead in providing workforce development preparation and training for students in various sectors including adding technology as older students seek to keep current with changes in the workforce (Hachey et al., 2013). These attributes and the diverse student body they serve have made community college leaders provide distance education anytime and anywhere and are a prime candidate to lead distance learning in the higher education arena (Inman, Kerwin, & Mayes, 1999). The community college's mission is the reason they have taken up this leadership role in distance education. Community colleges' distance learning courses have helped adults



who are working, busy, and are not able to sit in a classroom obtain their education with flexibility (Bower & Hardy, 2004).

Community colleges have also tailored their curriculum by “partnering with business and industry...to customize courses for specific workforce needs” (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 9). Bower and Hardy (2004) noted that the job market is changing and there is a demand for the workforce to be trained and acquire the skills necessary to fill the various in-demand career fields. Community colleges are well positioned to respond to versatile online instruction for students with all kinds of backgrounds because of community colleges’ flexible delivery options and “certificates” that are available to students (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 9). Smith (2010) specified that community college faculty will have to be prepared because online instruction is becoming extremely popular among community college students as a preferred method of learning, so colleges have responded by adding large numbers of online sections. Smith (2010) emphasizes that “it is no secret that significant enrollment growth for community colleges has the greatest potential through online courses” (Smith, 2010, p. 43).

Smith (2010) mentioned that community college faculty members’ roles and responsibilities have evolved so much that an online instructor is “synonymous” with a faculty member who only teaches face-to-face delivery (p. 44). Smith (2010) discussed the increase in the number of sections taught online has completely changed the community college faculty’s steps for preparation, planning, skill development, and pedagogy of the course content delivery. Many of the course management systems that community college faculty are familiar with, such as Blackboard, have undergone many

major upgrades and have become much more complex thus stressing the need for faculty professional development to keep current is vital (Smith, 2010).

Furthermore, the technology modes for providing content have also changed noticeably. Tools such as “Second Life, Facebook, Twitter, smartphones, and social media...[show that] means of delivery have altered the channels for delivering courses to the point that mobile learning has become a subset of online learning” (Smith, 2010, p. 48). With the changes in social media technology, scholars concluded that instructors needed to be knowledgeable about the various platforms and utilize such technologies in the classroom in order to better serve the needs of students (Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & Gonzalez Canche, 2015). Social media helped build academic connections and a sense of community, especially for at-risk student populations who face academic barriers and would benefit from a sense of “belonging”, which is “central to the theories of persistence” (Fagioli, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, 2015, p. 8).

While social media was not used fully in a strategic online learning environment, it was used individually by departments and specific offices to convey information about programs to students (Davis et al., 2015). Furthermore, when social media was used to communicate with students through higher education institutions, the information tended to be a “one-way” communication and therefore not allowing for students to interact in return (Davis et al., 2015, p. 412). Herndon (2011) suggests that community colleges should use “self-service, Web-based technology” to a greater extent by also providing students with academic advising, selecting of courses, and online course engagement (p. 17). All these technical changes to the academic landscape required faculty to be

prepared through professional development training. Next, the researcher will discuss faculty attitudes towards the shift to distance learning.

### **Faculty Attitudes**

For faculty who have taught in the classroom for many years and now are making the transition to teaching online, the process can be very overwhelming (Motte, 2013). For those that are just beginning their careers Cole & Kritzer (2009) state, “the prospect of having to learn to teach new courses in an online environment can be intimidating and stressful for faculty members who are new to higher education” (p. 36). Golden (2016) indicated that all these changes have “occurred without sufficient pedagogical training” for faculty to support them through this new way of teaching (p. 84). Pedagogy for online instruction is one of the main challenges faculty face when it comes to professional development (Smidt et al., 2014). Faculty have reported a level of “depersonalization” with teaching online courses and a lower “sense of personal accomplishment” perhaps attributed to the lack of personal feedback from students, which can affect faculty negatively in terms of motivating them to teach online course (Hogan & McKnight, 2007, p. 119). This lack of motivation to teach online courses is further complicated by the fact that faculty report work load as a huge barrier because of the amount of time, technical training, and resources needed to create an online class compared to a face-to-face course (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009).

Faculty, compared to higher education technology administrators, reported being more “pessimistic” about online learning whereas over “80 percent” of administrators report being “optimistic” about online learning and its potential and growth (Allen et al.,

2012, p. 2). In a survey of faculty, “nearly two-thirds” of instructors observed that learning outcomes are much higher in traditional classroom settings than in online instruction (Allen et al., 2012, p. 2). Faculty also expressed concern that rigorous classroom theories and assignments were hard enough to teach face-to-face and would become increasingly difficult to interpret and comprehend when students and instructors were apart online (Lei & Gupta, 2010). This limited opportunity of being able to provide direct instruction via lectures appeared to be considered by some faculty subpar to the traditional classroom. Some faculty believed that the traditional lecture classroom mode of instruction is the best way to teach a course and therefore is the standard to compare all other types of instruction delivery (Arinto, 2013). Lack of motivation in students was another factor faculty expressed was difficult enough in the face-to-face classroom and cause for concern in the online setting as well because the instructor and student are further apart making it difficult to inspire those students through the impersonal online mode of instruction (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Next, the researcher will discuss the changing roles of faculty in the online setting, which includes adapting to being a technology troubleshooter for students.

### **The Roles of Online Faculty**

Since online education has become increasingly popular in higher education, there has been a significant increase in the number of online faculty needed to deliver these types of courses. Compared to traditional classroom instruction, the development and implementation of online courses is considerably different and requires faculty to deliver content by other means rather than placing their current classroom materials into course

management systems such as Blackboard (Dunlap, Sobel, & Sands, 2007). For example, having an online course that is simply an online version of the textbook with PowerPoint slides did not intellectually engage students (Dunlap et al., 2007).

The structuring of online course content required faculty to communicate information differently than traditional classroom lectures and therefore delivering quality online course content requires considerable faculty time and training (Dykman & Davis, 2008). A weakness of online instruction when not conducted correctly was a lack of social interaction with peers, learning from students who come from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences and learning as much from each other during group work than from the classroom setting itself (Huang, 2002). According to Huang (2002), students face adversity when it comes to online instruction because students need to engage and participate. It is imperative that faculty understand how to do this engagement with students in an online environment to foster growth, learning, and understanding of the course materials (Huang, 2002). With all the advancements in technology, professors still had many concerns about online education. Instructors voiced their concern about how to “initiate interactions with students to build relationships” in order to gauge their progress and make it more meaningfully (Muirhead, 2000, p. 319).

Many instructors have specified that their “primary concern is how online education changes their roles and responsibilities, and how they can adapt to this change” (Yang & Cornelious, 2005, para. 9). Online learning became more popular for student preferred instruction and involved the faculty member to serve as more of an online

“facilitator” and no longer teach in the traditional lecture format, which is the mode of instruction that was favored by faculty (Yang & Cornelious, 2005, para. 9). Thus, this “role shift” for professors as “facilitators” and “mentors” necessitated a paradigm shift towards the usage of technology and being able to adapt to different teaching styles that they are traditionally not used to in order keep up with the times and challenges ahead in higher education (Yang & Cornelious, 2005, para. 10). This shift in roles was important for new online instructors to learn because their format of instructional delivery will be very different than faculty from the past who were trained to be lecturers but now needed to provide online facilitation (Smidt et al., 2014).

Online instructors were urged to take on new technological challenges by becoming skilled with the learning platform in a manner that goes beyond hosting the course syllabi and being able to utilize it in a matter that will facilitate “interactive activities” for students (Cuellar, 2002, p. 8). This also included helping to troubleshoot technological problems that online students will encounter (Cuellar, 2002). The burden of keeping up with these ever-changing technologies have become the responsibility of distance education faculty and the instructional design specialists of the college to help provide support (Amirault, 2012). Therefore, the professional development that faculty received before delivering an online course has been crucial as they transition to teaching online courses especially “for community college faculty members, given their large teaching loads” (Schrum, Burbank, Engle, Chambers, & Glassett, 2005, p. 279).

## **FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is very important to take the quality of faculty professional development into account because the ability of an instructor to develop a successful online course will potentially have an impact on student learning (Kane, Shaw, Pang, Salley, & Snider, 2016). Many faculty members were found to be frustrated with professional development because pedagogy was not included in online training and professional development generally covers technical aspects of the delivery system (Pankowski, 2004). Kinnie (2012) also emphasized that faculty professional development training should include pedagogical aspects of teaching online. There has been a considerable amount of restlessness and tension among faculty teaching online at community colleges as college administrators stress the need to continue to grow the number of sections (Floyd, 2003). This new way of teaching can be very challenging for faculty who feel a loss of independence because of the amount of new technology that exists in online courses (Floyd, 2003). In addition, faculty “experienced stress from the realization that many students are more knowledgeable of the technology than they are” (Floyd, 2003, p 339).

Roman, Kelsey, and Lin (2010) stated that the vast number of online courses that are offered in higher education have brought up questions about the development and the “quality” of those online courses (para. 3). As Abel (2005) stated “a quality online learning experience still has much more to do with the faculty member teaching the course than anything else. It’s still the teaching, not the technology” (p. 76). Professional development is further complicated because “the technology surrounding

online education keeps changing so rapidly, that this readiness may be in a state of flux” (Varvel, 2007, para. 4).

Faculty must communicate information differently online, for example by dividing information being conveyed into smaller segments rather than long narratives (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2002). Another element of the communication is the overall design of the courses. According to Dykman & Davis (2008) online courses should have a consistent layout because “if students must relearn a new online course structure for every course, that detracts from the content of the course and impedes the process of learning” (p.159). It is critical that professional development be provided to faculty teaching at community colleges because some of the students who attend community colleges are sometimes not prepared academically for the rigor of higher education courses (Schrum et al., 2005). Being independent and managing deadlines in order to be successful in an online course are some of the basic skills that are lacking in some students at community colleges and therefore this adds another layer of difficulty for faculty trying to develop their online courses (Schrum et al., 2005). Connecting with student populations that are hard to reach is complicated, and students are further disadvantaged by inadequate access to technology (Kirkwood, 2014). While an increasing number of students have taken online courses student completion rates are still an issue in online courses (Tyler-Smith, 2006).

It is clear that faculty needed training. According to Gibbons & Wentworth (2001) training is so important that “allowing instructors to teach online without formal training may be condemning the process to failure” (para. 22). An analysis of the



literature on faculty online training found that research was lacking from the perspective of instructors who receive the training as to what successful training looked like (Wolf, 2006). These instructor trainings must be well planned because they are at the heart of success for faculty teaching online courses (Wolf, 2006). Researchers have recommended various approaches on how to achieve these goals for faculty training. One approach for training faculty is that the instructor training programs be available online so that the professors experience the role of the student trying to learn via the online platform so that they can better understand the student's perspectives and challenges in an online course (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001). This perspective helps instructors reflect and better understand what their students experience and perhaps empathizes the challenges they may face when taking an online course and helps instructors better manage their online courses by providing feedback and troubleshooting problems (Wolf, 2006). The student's perspective is essential and should be taken into account when training instructors for online courses (Wolf, 2006).

Many online training programs for faculty tended to focus mainly on the technological aspects. Subsequently, researchers have stated that pedagogical aspects should equally be considered and in some cases "putting pedagogy before technology will allow for the effective delivery of online distance education courses" (Ascough, 2002, p.17). Wolf (2006) also emphasized the use of pedagogy in faculty professional development training. In order for faculty online training to be effective, faculty should already possess a "minimum" set of technological skills, such as basic computer navigation skills and basic web navigation skills before being enrolled in training to teach

online courses (Wolf, 2006, p. 56). A faculty member teaching face-to-face in a classroom might be an excellent instructor but such skills sometimes do not correlate in the online setting if faculty are not knowledgeable of the technology and how to effectively utilize it (Wolf, 2006). Faculty should be assessed on the basic skills, and the assessment should not be a self-assessment to ensure objectiveness (Wolf, 2006). Instructors who were not prescreened to determine if they had the basic technology skills in order to sign up for online training would holdup other instructors in the training program and hindered their progress (Wolf, 2006). In order for online training to be successful, institutions should “offer separate training for faculty who need to improve their computing skills” before they take on the challenge of learning new technological skills that they are not ready for (Wolf, 2006, p. 56).

Not all faculty were well-matched for online teaching because a faculty member might have been very charismatic and engaging in the classroom with a face-to-face audience but some of that is lost in the online world where everything must be in text on a computer screen (Wolf, 2006). Additionally, faculty must be willing to spend a few hours or more per day on their computer corresponding with students over various topics (Wolf, 2006). Furthermore, it was critical for instructors to be much more accessible to students and engaged with students on a daily basis and usually at different and accessible times to be the most responsive to online learning and technical issues that arise for students (Wolf, 2006).

The various online “faculty development programs fail to make significant changes to teaching itself, however, because they focus on the technical side of teaching

online, breaking it down into skill sets rather than addressing pedagogy” (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008, p. 30). Faculty professional development needed to evolve not only to include the technological skillset but also to include “faculty role changes” because the online teaching experience is different than in the classroom experience and the shift will take some time and effort to make the potential adjustments needed (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008, p. 30). Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) suggested the following examples of competencies were applicable and important to online teaching including: making sure that information was relevant and up to date, that students could access their class and find course announcements, and faculty provided relevant course content and exercises. They further suggested that instructors should create discussion boards where they engaged with other students and most importantly, received technical assistance if they experienced technical problems during an online course (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Faculty need many skills to provide successful online instruction, the problem became how could faculty develop these numerous skills in order to be successful in the online teaching environment (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008).

Woodell and Garofoli (2002) proposed training should have “multiple spaces with each space providing a different point of entry into the structure” to accommodate instructor’s needs and skillset (para. 12). For example, one “space” could have been for faculty to work on “self-paced tutorials and guided practice activities” (Woodell & Garofoli, 2002, para. 12). Another “space...would provide access to a database containing successful stories of technology integration” (Woodell & Garofoli, 2002, para. 12). A third “space” could have offered training with peers so that faculty could learn

from the experiences of others and gain valuable feedback that could lead to effective online course development (Woodell & Garofoli, 2002, para. 12). These different types of “spaces” might have provided faculty the flexibility to choose the path that works best for them based on their actual needs in order to have developed their online courses (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008, p. 31).

Recognizing that faculty have limited time constraints, a one size fits all approach is not going to provide faculty the type of professional development training that will address their various needs (Anderson, Varnhagen, & Campbell, 1998). Furthermore, Anderson et al. (1998) offered creative options on how to provide professional development to faculty at convenient times, such as lunch workshops and retreat-type institutes (p. 95). Faculty have demonstrated a preference on trainings where they can access hands-on activities and participate in training at convenient times throughout the semester instead of a one-time onboarding training (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008).

Time has been considered one of the toughest obstacles faculty have identified for the lack of planning, preparing, and training for their online courses (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Yet faculty were also “guarded about the time required to develop their abilities to complete those tasks more effectively” (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008, p. 35). In addition, Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) found that faculty had strong inclinations for “one-on-one assistance” when it came to professional development for online courses which supported much of the literature that recommended a “mentoring program” in order to help faculty develop their online courses (p. 36).

Moreover, Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) addressed the fact that more needed to be done to help faculty with online professional development, including more studies that would identify what would be most beneficial for faculty and which approaches would be most conducive to online faculty professional development.

Furthermore, a study would also be able to identify other logistical training foundational questions including times, locations, and what duration of time would make the most sense for providing meaningful training for faculty that they would take advantage of (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Lastly, examining instructional designers' experiences and comparing them with faculty experiences would add another element of understanding to develop training that would be beneficial for colleges (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008).

#### **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND RESOURCES**

Many stakeholders including “administrators...must understand the impact that associated technological advances will have on the culture of their institutions” (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 11). Faculty will need a lot of administrative support to be able to adapt to the new ways of teaching online both in terms of “changes in technology as well as the changes in their roles” (Bower & Hardy, 2004, p. 11). Ever changing technology and policies toward online instruction will in turn lead to continued planning on the part of faculty to maintain and update their online courses, leading to a greater need for faculty development (Fish & Wickersham, 2009). According to Fish and Wickersham (2009) the learning management system colleges use to teach online courses must be easy to use and intuitive for students and faculty to be able to navigate and learn. Therefore, Fish and

Wickersham (2009) suggested that faculty support was critical to ensuring that colleges have a quality program best designed for teaching students through this mode of instruction. College administrators must support the needs of this type of instructional delivery by providing instructional support training in order to ensure success for both faculty and students (Fish & Wickersham, 2009). In higher education, instructional support referred to the support the college provided faculty members to develop their online courses (Lee, 2001). Administrators can provide support in “the forms of course redesign support, training the use and application of distance education technologies, training in teaching methods, and media and technical support” (Lee, 2001, p. 153).

In addition, higher education administrators must recognize that faculty will have to dedicate considerable amount of time to be able to undergo the professional development training to develop the various technology skills needed to be able to teach online courses and the course materials they would have to create and adapt to be conducive for an online setting (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Distance education courses become successful when institutions of higher education recognize and “provide the necessary financial, human, and infrastructure resources necessary to design, maintain, and support the distance education training program” (Wolf, 2006, p. 60).

There is a continued need for more qualified instructors to teach in online modes of instruction and a shortage of faculty trained and ready to step in (Roman et al., 2010). Therefore, Roman et al (2010) suggested that colleges needed to invest in quality professional development and training programs that would prepare more faculty for online instruction and those colleges that made a larger commitment would see the

benefits long-term by supporting more students. The literature indicated the need for ongoing professional development for institutions of higher education and in particular for community college faculty who responded to the increased demand for online learning. Teaching online is going to require a different mindset with community college faculty about their changing roles with their online courses. Providing faculty with the tools to help them obtain skills will embolden faculty to be more accepting of distance education (Lee & Busch, 2005).

The concept of delivering education online is here to stay and a college being prepared to provide quality training for faculty is a critical component and one that will continue to evolve as technology advances (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Community colleges' constant evolution and diverse student body population made it ideal for leading the charge for distance learning education (Bower & Hardy, 2004). The literature has indicated that professional development was needed but there was a gap in the literature as far as how best to prepare faculty and what type of training was most effective for community college faculty teaching online courses.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the literature review related to online education and the need for professional development training for faculty who teach online courses at community colleges. First, the literature in this chapter gave a background of online education in higher education discussing the rapid growth and expansion over the years, particular in community colleges. Furthermore, the literature discussed faculty who teach online courses addressing their attitudes about online education versus traditional face-to-

face lecture classes and their changing roles in the online environment. In addition, the literature addressed the need for faculty professional development in order to adequately be trained and prepared both from the technological and pedagogical aspect to teach online classes effectively (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Lastly, it addressed the institutional support and resources needed for faculty professional development. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology for the study.



## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Chapter three described the methodology used in studying how community college faculty perceived the effectiveness of professional development training they received in order to prepare to teach online courses. The purpose of the study, the research methodology, theoretical framework, research design, ethical considerations, and limitations and delimitations are explained herein.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

According to researchers, “the profile of students in higher education is becoming increasingly non-traditional” (Walters et al., 2017 p. 4). Such students are not able to meet face-to-face in traditional classrooms during designated meeting times and days due to the numerous obligation they are trying to balance in their lives (Walters et al., 2017). Therefore colleges including community colleges are trying to make sure these students are not left behind by offering online courses, in order to cater to student population that perhaps cannot take classes during the traditional hours (Walters et al., 2017). The increase in online courses will require faculty to be ready to take on the new challenge of teaching online and undergo professional development to prepare them for the transition (Walters et al., 2017). Walters et al. (2017) suggests, “institutions can consider conducting a gap analysis prior to developing the specific content of training that gauges the climate of online learning from the perspective of faculty who are currently engaged in teaching” (p. 5). Grounded in Bandura’s self-efficacy theory, the purpose of this study was to examine community college faculty’s perceptions about the professional development training they received in order to successfully teach online courses.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- I. What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses?
- II. What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses?
- III. What are community college faculty members' expectations for being ready to teach online classes?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand faculty's perceptions about professional development training at community colleges requires a research method and design that is suitable for this type of study. Therefore, for this study, a qualitative research method was utilized to study the phenomenon. As Hays and Singh (2012) noted "in clinical and educational disciplines, practitioners and educators interact daily with students, clients, peers, colleagues, or administrators and encounter phenomena that needs to be understood in context to guide our work as well as influence policy" (p. 4). The qualitative method allowed the researcher to fully understand faculty experiences and perceptions about the professional development training that is currently available in order to be ready to teach online courses. Qualitative research aided researchers to "listen to individuals' accounts of a phenomenon, engaging actively, and integrating new perspectives into their own ways of understanding participants, the context, phenomenon, or all three" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4). The use of the qualitative research method allowed for the community college faculty to discuss their experiences with professional development

training through an open-ended structure. Qualitative interviews allowed faculty to discuss whether they felt prepared to teach online and explore areas of professional development that faculty expressed they needed more support to be better prepared to teach online.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study explored community college faculty's perception about the professional development training they received in order to develop and teach their online courses. The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which was based on the concept that an individual's belief or perceived confidence for coordinating and carrying out a specific action influences whether a specific action is taken (Bandura, 1986). Professional development training can be successful if faculty believe in their ability to learn new technology and skills that are needed to develop their online courses.

Bandura's social learning theory held that "efficacy in dealing with one's environment is not a fixed act or simply a matter of knowing what to do" (Bandura, 1982, p.122). Based on his research, he theorized that it "involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes. A capability is only as good as its execution" (Bandura, 1982, p.122). According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy is "based on four principle sources of information. These include performance attainments; vicarious experiences of observing the performances of others; verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities; and physiological

states from which people partly judge their capability, strength, and vulnerability” (p. 126). Bandura noted that efficacy is influenced through the “vicarious experiences” of others, meaning that by studying other people’s experiences and seeing them overcome their challenges, a person’s efficacy can raise (Bandura, 1982, p. 126). These “vicarious experiences” helped others build confidence in their own abilities because they saw a person with similar skills to them accomplish their challenges so they too felt they could do the same (Bandura, 1982, p. 126). Because this study aimed to explore community college faculty’s experiences with professional development, Bandura’s self-efficacy theory helped to understand professors’ motivations and perceptions about their own abilities to develop their online course and how they overcome challenges to that endeavor.

Another method Bandura used was “verbal persuasion” which was to measure whether people believed in their ability to achieve certain goals (Bandura, 1982, p. 127). However, “although social persuasion alone may be limited in its power to create enduring increases in self-efficacy, it can contribute to successful performance if the heightened appraisal is within realistic bounds” (Bandura, 1982, p.127). This “verbal persuasion” has the greatest impact on those who already had some level of confidence in their own skills (Bandura, 1982, p. 127). A faculty’s own perceived confidence in the online arena was important to understand because of how they perceived the professional development offered by the institution. Furthermore, Bandura (1982) also mentioned “people rely partly on information from their physiological state in judging their capabilities” (p. 127). If people perceived that an activity is “stressful and taxing,” that

will have an impact on their ability to perform the task (Bandura, 1982, p. 127). If a person's self-efficacy is deficient, "people tend to behave ineffectually, even though they know what to do" (Bandura, 1982, p.127). Subsequently, a person's "self-perceived learning efficacy affects how much effort is invested in given activities and what levels of performance are attained" (Bandura, 1982, p.128). Consequently, "judgments of one's capabilities partly determine choice of activities and rate of skill acquisition, and performance mastery, in turn, can boost perceived self-efficacy in a mutually enhancing process" (Bandura, 1982, p.128).

Incentives have helped with mastering tasks that seem challenging and can help contribute to the self-efficacy of an individual (Bandura, 1982). The use of incentives was frequently useful in understanding faculty motivation because according to Bandura (1982), "positive incentives foster performance accomplishments. Gaining knowledge and skills that enable one to fulfill personal standards of merit tend to heighten interest and a firm sense of personal efficacy (p. 133). In addition, "success in attaining desired outcomes through challenging performances can further verify existing competencies. This was because people usually did not perform maximally, though they possess the constituent skills" (Bandura, 1982, p. 133). People needed incentives, and "it is under incentives that test upper limits that people find out what they are able to do. By mobilizing high effort, incentives could help to substantiate talents, even though no new skills are acquired in the process" (Bandura, 1982, p. 133). Incentives were important to consider according to Bandura because "rewards also assume efficacy informative value when competencies are difficult to gauge from performance alone, which is often the

case.” (Bandura, 1982, p.133). Through Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy, the researcher explored community college faculty’s experiences with professional development training; explored the challenges they have experienced; understand their needs; and provided recommendations for institutional practice.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design for this study included the major components of the site selection, participant selection, sources of data, and data analysis.

### **Site Selection**

Since the aim of the study was to understand community college faculty who teach online courses and their perceptions about the professional development training they received, the selection process for this study involved purposive sampling. Hays and Singh (2012) stated, “the intention in purposive sampling is to select participants for the amount of detail they can provide about a phenomenon” (p. 8). Realizing that a large community campus drew diverse faculty, the researcher selected an urban community college in Texas for this study. The community college had over 3,000 credit students and more than 500 non-credit students. The urban community college had more than one campus in the region. The faculty was made up of a mixed ratio of full-time and adjunct faculty instructors. The community college for the study provided numerous courses in various fields online, giving students the ability to complete an entire degree online, but further challenging faculty and administrators to keep up with online course demand. The increased demand in online sections led to more professional development needed to train and prepare more online faculty.

## **Participant Selection**

Purposeful sampling was used in the participant selection. According to Merriam (2009), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). The researcher conducted a pre-interview survey within the Government Department only at an urban community college in Texas and a total of 16 full time faculty responded to the pre-interview survey. The pre-interview survey results helped the researcher select potential faculty participants. As a result, a recruitment email was sent to the list of potential participants and eight participants that met the requirements were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The participants in this study consisted of eight full-time faculty therefore adjunct faculty were not included because they were not permitted to teach online courses in the Government Department at this urban community college. Furthermore, the participants were required to have online teaching experience of at least three years. Selecting faculty that had at least three years experience teaching online allowed for the data to have depth because faculty could speak from an understanding through years of practice. As Hays and Singh (2012) stated it helps the researcher to “establish criteria to obtain information-rich cases of your phenomenon” (p. 164). United States government and Texas state and local government were both required courses that each student must take in the state of Texas in order to receive a bachelor’s degree. Therefore, these courses were important to study because it was in the Texas Core Curriculum and they were high demand courses

taken by many students. As such, most community colleges had to add sections in all modes of instruction to make government courses available to all students.

Prior to interviewing the participants, the researcher requested that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from The University of Texas at Austin approve the researcher's proposal. The researcher also obtained the approval of the urban community college before conducting the research. The researcher provided all participants with a copy of the informed consent form before scheduling interviews at their campus.

### **Sources of Data**

The purpose of the study was to understand faculty perceptions regarding the professional development training they received in order to teach online courses. To achieve this, the researcher collected data from a pre-interview survey, one-semi structured interview for each participant, and transcripts.

To begin with, a pre-interview survey was conducted in the Government Department with full time faculty only. The survey asked demographic information such as sex, age, race, ethnicity, faculty title, and educational level. The pre-interview survey also asked questions about how long the faculty had been teaching, if they taught online courses, and the preparation and satisfaction with the professional development training they had received. More information about the pre-interview survey questionnaire can be found in the Appendix B.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews helped the researcher understand the participants' current experiences through "conversational and open dialogue that involved an exchange of narratives" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 238). They were scheduled



in advance with the participants at the campus of the faculty member. The researcher established an interview protocol to serve as a guide and starting point. However, once the interview progressed, other related subject questions were asked based on clarity. The semi-structured interviews helped the community college faculty to speak and elaborate on their experiences teaching online courses. Faculty were also able to discuss what approaches they thought would better prepare them to teach online.

In addition, the interviews with the community college faculty were recorded to provide transcripts for further analysis. The participants' real names remained confidential, and pseudonyms were used for the faculty participants. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and served as the primary resource for data collection.

These multiple sources of data helped the researcher to better understand community college faculty's perception of the professional development training they received to teach online courses.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher created a method for analyzing the data gathered through the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded. According to Merriam (2009), coding is "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 173). A codebook was created to document, understand, and identify themes and patterns while coding (Hays & Singh, 2012). It contained the definition and descriptions of codes to help the researcher keep track of all the data collected. The process involved reading and rereading the transcripts

repeatedly and trying to find connections between the data. After all interviews were coded, words and phrases were organized, based on the themes that emerged.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The ethical considerations were essential for the researcher to guarantee that proper procedures were taken to maintain data confidentiality and to minimize researcher bias.

### **Data Confidentiality**

The researcher verified the data collection process met the ethical guidelines set by the university's Internal Review Board (IRB). All of the participants were required to sign an informed consent form in advance. The researcher complied with privacy and anonymity rules by assigning pseudonyms for participants on all documentation to protect the participants' identities. The collection of all data, which included documents, recorded interviews, and transcripts, was stored in a secure location in a locked home office of the researcher where no one had access. The stored data will be kept for the purpose of the research and will be destroyed upon completion of the study, which includes the destruction of the audio recordings.

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher in this study disclosed any research bias that might influence the study in anyway. According to Merriam (2009), the researcher should try to reduce any potential bias by not inserting themselves in the data and reduce "leading questions" (p. 99). The researcher's professional background is a full-time faculty member at a community college who previously served as an adjunct instructor. The researcher has

experience teaching online course and has received some professional development training to teach online courses. The researcher has taught online courses at two community college districts. The researcher has observed how faculty develop their courses very differently from one another and noticed that there was no uniform rubric or expectation of how an online course should be designed. The prior experience of the researcher proved to be valuable in locating interviewers for the research study and understanding their responses. The researcher took steps to minimize any bias.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

The study was limited by the scope of faculty type being interviewed. For the purpose of this study, full-time community college faculty who taught online were interviewed. The study did not represent the perceptions or experiences of adjunct faculty who teach online. Only Department of Government faculty were interviewed therefore limiting the experience to one discipline. Government faculty may have more or less training because of the volume of sections needed at community colleges to fulfill students' core curriculum class needs. The study was conducted at an urban community college in Texas; the experience may be different for faculty who teach at rural community colleges.

#### **SUMMARY**

There was a high demand for online government sections at community colleges because they were required courses in the Texas Core Curriculum. Therefore, the study focused the research on the high demand subject of government and interviewed eight full-time faculty members in the Government Department who taught government

courses online for at least three years. The aim of the research study was to better understand the professional development experiences of community college faculty who taught online courses. This chapter discussed the research methodology that was utilized to conduct the study. The purpose of the study and the theoretical framework utilized were established. Then the research design, which included site selection, participant selection, sources of data, and data analysis, was discussed. In addition, ethical considerations were considered to safeguard data confidentiality and guard against researcher bias. Also, limitations and delimitations of the study were acknowledged. Together with the theoretical framework the research methodology was useful for collecting new data from the interviewers. The next chapter will discuss the research findings.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

The data presented in chapter four consisted of three types of information, which included the results regarding the demographics of the interviewees as collected in a pre-interview survey, the summaries of the transcribed face-to-face interviews and the themes that emerged during the research, and the public data available to all faculty in the Government Department of the community college. Eight full-time community college faculty were interviewed about their experiences teaching online courses. The following research questions were used to frame the study:

1. What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses?
2. What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses?
3. What are community college faculty members' expectations for being ready to teach online classes?

The researcher derived the information regarding the demographics of the study participants from the pre-interview survey and then confirmed the data from the interviews. All participants in this study were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The following community college full-time faculty presented in alphabetical order by their first name were interviewed for this study: Chris Green, Ethan Red, Janis White, Joe Blue, Linda Black, Mary Orange, Robert Brown, and Sara Yellow.

## POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

The population for this study consisted of eight total participants: four female full-time faculty and four male full-time faculty. Four participants were between the ages of 36 and 45 years old, one was between the age of 46 and 55 years old, two were between the ages of 56 and 65 years old, and one participant was between 60 and 75 years old. The sample population's race consisted of one African American, four whites, two Hispanics, and one Other category. The educational level of the eight faculty members consisted of five members had doctoral degrees and three faculty members had a master's degree. Within the sample population, five had the title Professor, two had the title Associate Professor, and one had the title Assistant Professor. From the eight participants, three had nine years or fewer of teaching experience online, and five had more than 10 years experience teaching experience online. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the sample population.

TABLE 1: POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Faculty Title</b>	<b>Online Teaching Experience</b>
<b>Chris</b>	Male	56-65	African American	Ph.D.	Professor	15 years
<b>Ethan</b>	Male	60-75	White	Ph.D.	Professor	25 years
<b>Janis</b>	Female	36-45	White	Masters	Associate Professor	5 years
<b>Joe</b>	Male	36-45	Other	Masters	Associate Professor	9 years
<b>Linda</b>	Female	36-45	Hispanic	Ph.D.	Professor	14 years
<b>Mary</b>	Female	36-45	Hispanic	Masters	Assistant Professor	3 years
<b>Robert</b>	Male	56-65	White	Ph.D.	Professor	20 years
<b>Sara</b>	Female	46-55	White	Ph.D.	Professor	16 years

## **PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

Profiles of each of the participants summarize how each person self-identified teaching backgrounds and professional goals. In an effort to understand the faculty's views on professional development and their experiences at an urban community college, a review of the participant's profiles are provided. The researcher maintained anonymity and confidentiality by giving each participant a pseudonym. The profiles are presented in alphabetical order by the participants' first name. Each participant disclosed the following information during the interviews to the researcher.

### **Chris Green**

Chris is a professor in the Government Department who had been teaching for over 20 years in the classroom and 15 years online. His teaching experience included high school but mostly community college teaching. When asked what led him to teach at a community college, he mentioned he preferred to teach rather than research. When asked about what it means to teach distance-learning classes, he expressed that he liked the fact that students who had families and other work obligations, who could not attend a traditional classroom because of time constraints, would nonetheless be able to enroll in college classes and further their education.

He believed that professional development should include "competencies in pedagogy and technology and research shown best practices." He expressed that the professional development opportunities offered by the institution were "adequate to some extent." Chris stated that "teaching online was still evolving and there was more that could be done in terms of conception and delivery" so he thought the college had done an

adequate job of that endeavor. He described the focus of the professional development has been on the technology delivery side, “but as far as pedagogy, I don’t feel there has been a lot of help in that area” from the college to prepare for online courses.

### **Ethan Red**

Ethan is a professor of government who has been teaching for 30 years in the classroom and for 25 years distance learning. He has taught at two universities prior to being recruited to come teach at the community college. Ethan expressed that he really believes in distance learning and enjoys teaching online. He stated that distance learning has come a long way from when he first started in that it has helped students access education that they might not have had the opportunity otherwise. Besides the newly introduced professional development instrument Quality Matters, he thought the college had not done a very good job of offering professional development. From his experience, professional development has been a “waste of all our time” because it was more about compliance in order for the college to maintain its accreditation rather than gaining skills he needed as a professor. He also indicated that it would be helpful if the professional development training were offered by people who had classroom instruction experience.

### **Janis White**

Janis has a couple of years of teaching experience at two urban universities but mostly at the community college level as an associate professor in the Government Department. She been teaching for 12 years in the classroom at the community college level and five years teaching online at the community college level. As far as what led her to teach at a community college she stated that she applied at the local community



college for an open position and got it, and she ended up staying at the community college level and eventually became a full-time professor. When asked about what it meant to teach distance-learning classes, she expressed that she believed the direction of higher education in the country was going in the way of online education. She stated that while there are some concerns, she believed that “online education makes education accessible” to professionals and others who have busy and hectic schedules and who cannot come and sit in a classroom.

When questioned what professional development meant for her, she expressed that professional development should be something that made you “better at your job” so you have that supplemental learning in order to not get into a “rut”. She voiced that the college offered a lot of professional development related to technology in general but as far as professional development related to distance learning, she stated the college doesn’t have a lot of professional development opportunities in that area. She noted that with the recent exception of Quality Matter training, which focused on course design, the college hasn’t offered very much professional development dealing with content, either.

### **Joe Blue**

Joe is an associate professor in the Government Department and has been teaching for 14 years in the classroom and nine years online. He taught for one year at an urban university and the rest of the rest of the time, he taught at the community college level. He started as an adjunct instructor at the community college and then later became full time. When asked about what it meant to teach distance-learning classes, he expressed that it meant “trying to do what you do in your classroom and translate that

into an online environment.” For Joe, professional development meant two things. First, there was the professional development that was mandated by the institution which he thought was often an exercise in compliance rather than actual professional growth. Then there was the professional development that faculty researched for themselves when they were presented with a problem that they needed to address and therefore they would “seek out the answers and the information and skills that they need on their own.” He added that the most meaningful professional development he experienced was the type that was tailored to the unique situation of the instructor. He expressed that on the one hand, the college provided a lot of resources if faculty wanted to improve their teaching and there were a lot of competent instructional designers who knew a lot about Blackboard and course design but less about actual pedagogy. On the other hand, Joe thought those trainings were important for instructors who needed help on Blackboard and course design, but he revealed he was past that stage and didn’t have any technical issues and was now looking for more professional development in the area of collaboration. He wanted to be able to see what’s going on in other professors’ classes online to get ideas for his own class. He wanted faculty to enroll themselves in their colleagues’ online classes as a guest observer through Blackboard and see how they spend a month with their students online.

### **Linda Black**

Linda is a professor of government who had been teaching in the classroom for 21 years and for 14 years online. Her teaching experience included teaching in a rural community college and now her current position is in an urban community college.

When asked what led her to teach at a community college, she replied “it’s the best fit for me in terms of my personal goals” of helping students navigate college. She believed in the mission of community colleges: providing affordable access, supporting the community, and the structure to help first-generation college students become successful and transfer in order to finish their degrees and graduate.

Regarding her views on online education, she thought distance learning gave students an education who are geographically unable to attend campus whether because of transportation or they were somewhere rural. She valued student engagement because she noted, “I think it’s another outlet for students to be able to engage themselves better with their degree plan in order to achieve their goals of getting those degrees.” She has taught students from all parts of the state and world and that has been fulfilling for her as a professor. She viewed professional development as “keeping things fresh.” She further stated that teaching is one of those processes that “can go stale if you do not work at it” and professional development helped faculty keep growing and learning at the college. She expressed that professional development has come a long way from the time she started teaching online where there wasn’t much offered for online teaching. Linda noted the current focus had been on Blackboard and other technology tools.

### **Mary Orange**

Mary is an assistant professor of government who has been teaching in the classroom for 11 years and three years online. She has had teaching experience at an urban university and two community colleges. She attended a community college as a student and enjoyed her experience and the environment. That experience is what

eventually led her to teach at a community college. Mary expressed distance learning has helped give students more access to those who work full time and do not have the time to attend class in person.

With regard to what professional development means for Mary, she stated that she enjoyed some of what was offered and did not find some workshops as valuable as others. She found certain aspects to be beneficial and other aspects to be more of a requirement of the college to “check off boxes” that didn’t matter in her view. Mary found the professional development on PowerPoint trainings to be useful in her lectures. She also attended a professional development called “globalizing curriculum” to be fun, and she learned to improve her course materials quite a bit through that professional development. She believed “it’s very hard to impose a sort of a rigid checkbox structure on something as fluid as teaching.” She did convey that professional development training was different now than when she first started online teaching, and she applauded the college for the effort to provide professional development. However, she also thought that it felt like an “added burden” that she had to do. Mary said “even though I felt my course was adequately set up, I can understand how perhaps that’s not everyone’s experience and perhaps some people do need to have that sort of overlying structure to set up their course.” But for Mary, she felt that online template structure was “just sort of bureaucratic layer on top of what is a creative construction of content” for professors. She applauds the college for trying to make online content good for students, but she thought that the professional development could be too rigid for her creativity.

**Robert Brown**

Robert is a professor of government who has been teaching in the classroom for 32 years and of that 20 years has also been teaching online. He has taught at two other big universities prior to his current position at the community college. He has taught at the community college level for 21 years. He wanted to teach at the community college level because he has relished the community college student experience. He thought the students were more teachable and more interested in learning. He said he could make more “of a difference teaching at a community college than at a big university” because of the size of the classrooms. For Robert, distance learning meant that the “instructor and student are not in the same place at the same time” and learning is done in an online environment.

Professional development for Robert meant an ongoing continuing education to your “existing skills and to teach you new skills to adapt what might be old knowledge to a new learning environment.” Regarding his views about the professional development offerings the college provided, he had mixed feelings. At one level, he thought it was “incredibly minimal and incredibly inadequate.” However, he thought, “at another level, if you’re a good hunter and gatherer and are self-motivated, there are plenty of resources available at the institution,” both in terms of people who could help and online training modules that could benefit faculty. But, “you have to be internally motivated to go find that stuff.” Robert recognized that instructors very much needed to push themselves in order to develop their courses. He also felt what was minimally required by the institution was “clearly inadequate. It is not nearly enough to prepare you to teach even a

minimally adequate class.” According to Robert, self-motivation was an important element in professional development.

### **Sara Yellow**

Sara is a professor in the Government Department who has been teaching for 30 years in the classroom and 16 years online. Her teaching experience included high school, three universities, and a community college. All were located in urban areas with one university located in a rural area. When asked what led to her to teach at a community college, she stated that she started her education at a community college, and it helped her prepare for transfer to a university. She spoke fondly of her professors during her community college days as a student. To this day, she remembered her professors wrote positive comments on her papers and how that uplifted her. Because of this interaction, she realized that she wanted to be that type of role model for her students when she became a professor.

For Sara, professional development meant getting better and having opportunities to get better at all parts of her profession, whether it was content related or for building rapport with students. Sara summarized professional development as having a “menu of offerings” to choose from in order to improve all aspects of her profession. She noted, “I don't view it as a violation of my academic freedom, or as non-teachers are telling me how to teach.” She emphasized that she enjoyed professional development and didn't view it as the college forcing her to do something, but rather she saw it as the college offering her a menu of options that she could select from. Sara described she had done all kinds of professional development, dealing with a range of topics, such as technology,

better communication with staff, and suicide prevention. She stated that the focus had heavily been on Blackboard, but she understood that all colleges are trying to figure out the online part of education and that her college was no different. She also pointed out that there have been challenges in getting faculty members' attitudes to change and to embrace the best practices in online learning. She did not perceive instructional designers as a threat as some faculty may; she was more optimistic about embracing change and developing her skills.

This section delivered brief summaries by the eight community college faculty members in response to questions about their background and teaching experience as a professor, what led them to teach at a community college, and what professional development mean for them. In the next part of this chapter, the researcher will provide the themes that arose in several reviews to code manually the transcripts of the statements of the community college faculty members.

### **EMERGENT THEMES**

Guided by the research questions, the interviewer questions prompted the participants to address four areas. While I expected they would talk about general challenges, I found out they were much more specific about challenges they faced about online teaching. As a result of the data, the emergent themes that were revealed were beyond Blackboard: how faculty address asynchronous teaching and its limits, the urgent need for collaboration and content mentorship, the Quality Matters course design training, and the pedagogical challenges of teaching adults to teach online.

## **Beyond Blackboard: How Faculty Address Asynchronous Teaching and Its Limits**

The first theme the researcher identified, according to the faculty interviews was the Blackboard Learning Management System. Blackboard had been the focus of professional development for all the departments at the campus and the main focus of professional development for the Government Department for a long time. All faculty at the community college where the study took place taught their online courses using Blackboard, and the College required mandatory online orientation for distance learning courses through Blackboard for all students within the first week of classes. All students' online courses were loaded onto Blackboard, and thus Blackboard was the starting point for all students taking an online course at this community college. Learning to utilize Blackboard and its many functions such as grade book, test development, discussion boards, and incorporating those into the online courses was very important for faculty teaching their online courses. The emphasis on Blackboard precluded faculty from alternative online instruction.

In spite of their experiences and frustrations with Blackboard, six of the eight faculty mentioned that they perceived to be prepared at this stage of their teaching experience and had been adequately trained on the use of Blackboard. Ethan stated, "at this point, Blackboard was so well developed because it has gone through several iterations and it's pretty good now." His view was that the learning management system had updated several times and improved over the years and was basically a good software. He also had been given adequate training on how to use Blackboard, and he felt confident at this point that he did not need more training on Blackboard. Robert also



echoed these sentiments, stating he “needed far less of you know teaching about specific pieces of technology. We need far less of teaching how Blackboard works or where you click in Blackboard or how you build a component in Blackboard.” Robert thought that he has been given plenty of opportunities to learning the various components of Blackboard, so now it was not his focus of professional development. Other faculty such as Chris also mentioned that he felt he had a good grasp of Blackboard and other technologies such as learning Microsoft PowerPoint, Wikis, and so forth. Chris said he needed less of that type of training on the delivery of technology.

Moreover, most faculty stated that being trained on Blackboard was very important because it was the foundational tool they used to teach online courses at their community college, so it was extremely important for faculty to know how to utilize the system. Janis stated, “What little professional development we had related to online learning has really been technology-based which is not necessarily bad because some of our instructors are older and they don't really know how to use Blackboard.” They did not suggest getting rid of that type of professional development but suggested that they had advanced through that stage of their training and were looking for other types of professional development to help them teach their online courses. Janis shared these sentiments by stating that there were faculty who needed these technology trainings, and it was important that the College provided it to those who need it, but she and others were looking for the next level to help them teach their online courses. Next level meant different things to different faculty. Janis expressed that she took Blackboard workshops, and she didn't need to learn how to operate the Blackboard system so much; rather, she

needed professional development in order to use Blackboard to teach her specific content. She stated, “I need someone to help me translate what I do in the classroom to an online platform...there hasn't been anything that our institution or our department provided or are encouraging us to do.” Janis acknowledged that Blackboard training was very important for those who need it, but she needed help transforming her classroom onto the platform setting. Sara also agreed by saying, “I think I have had enough of how this Blackboard works, how voice thread works, and how you can add a video to your Blackboard.” She expressed that the professional development department meant well and were trying to help faculty, but they were not content experts, so they were just doing their jobs by helping faculty train on the different technological capabilities.

There are still technical challenges that professors have to address. Robert stated that the fast moving technological evolution was a real challenge for him to manage when teaching online. Robert stated that “keeping up with a student body that is either very technically sophisticated or is not sophisticated at all” is a challenge because “you've got to decide where to kind of pitch technologically to your class.” He expressed that he had this balancing act with the types of technology to implement and the way he used that technology in an online classroom because he mentioned “if you pitch it to the most technologically advanced student, you'll skip over the head of those who are not very technologically advanced, and if you pitch to the bottom, you'll bore those at the top.” Robert also brought up the technological challenges of the different types of devices being utilized by students to access their online courses. Some students were doing their online class work from a traditional desktop or laptop whereas another portion of the

students were using tablets and phones to conduct their online courses. Thus, there was value described by the participants that they needed to keep pace with the continuous technological changes, but other pedagogical content help is also needed in order to be successful teaching online.

### **The Urgent Need for Collaboration and Content Mentorship**

The second theme, the urgent need for collaboration and content mentorship, emerged from my interviews with faculty teaching online course. Seven of the eight faculty who were interviewed mentioned they needed help along the lines of a content expert, mentor, faculty collaborator, one-on-one, or an apprenticeship type of training to help them develop and teach their online course. There was a unanimous expression of need by the faculty regarding how they should take their face-to-face classroom skillset and content knowledge and transfer that into an online setting, utilizing the dominant tool of the College, which was the Learning Management System of Blackboard.

Sara expressed this content expert need by stating she needed “somebody who is a content expert” who can help her teach for example, the topic of federalism in an online setting. She found federalism to be a difficult topic to convey online and having a “content expert who has tried various online activities and approaches” on the subject who could provide feedback on what was successful or not was the type of professional development she was seeking. She further elaborated that having to learn from someone who already teaches the discipline or had a degree in the area would be very helpful. Sara “thinks faculty members would maybe accept that from somebody who is in the trenches with them.” She mentioned that a number of years ago, the College tried to

implement something along the lines of a mentor when a few select course sections were assigned faculty coaches. This meant a faculty member of the Government Department was enrolled in the online course of another instructor to serve as a faculty coach. The aim of these faculty coaches was to help explain why a number of students were failing online courses or withdrawing from them. Unfortunately, the faculty coach position was not well defined by the College, according to Sara, and it was too much for faculty to handle on top of teaching their full load and was no longer being utilized extensively.

Ethan also mentioned that one-on-one interaction was the best way to provide professional development training to faculty. He felt being able to get guidance and feedback when done in such a setting would help him with professional development. Ethan believed this type of professional development should be provided at the department level and not necessary at the college level because of the feasibility. Other participants interviewed, such as Robert, expressed ideas along the same lines and that it should take place at the department level. Robert said, “I think the best sort of training for someone who is just starting to teach an online class would to do an apprenticeship with an experienced and good distance learning teacher.” Robert stated, this apprenticeship type of professional development where a new faculty member would shadow a more experienced faculty member online for a semester or a year would help him or her learn how to construct their class. According to Robert, the apprenticeship approach would enable the faculty members new to online teaching to observe their mentor regarding how they teach their online materials, how they assess their materials, and how they interact with students.

There was a clear desire among the participants to have a mentorship type of professional development from a faculty member who had extensive experience teaching online in order to gain support with course development and preparation. Janis also mentioned that she would ideally love a disciplined-based instructional designer to help faculty develop and translate the classroom into an online environment one-on-one, but she recognized that might not be so feasible in terms of cost for the College to provide. She recommended as an alternative that the instructional designers could identify talented professors who were doing great teaching online and could provide a collaborative professional development with those professors who could then talk about their tips and tricks and share with other faculty. According to Janis, instructional designers were great at providing technological help such as guidance on Blackboard but did not have the discipline-specific knowledge to help with specific subjects. She acknowledged that the technological guidance was important; however, she needed professional development on government-discipline specific topics such as gerrymandering. Janis stated that understandably, the instructional designers, “don’t know what gerrymandering is or how to help me on an assignment or how to translate it online.” Thus, Janis expressed that the mentorship and collaborative approach with instructors within the department or perhaps even other instructors with similar disciplines might be a helpful approach in order to help gain ideas about different methods to teaching course material online.

Mary also agreed with the need for having someone guide and help faculty develop their online course. She said, “I think they should give us someone to work with who has already taught it, someone who can help us load it online and explore different

ways to teach it.” She wanted someone who had taught the discipline before and could help her explore what kinds of videos had worked or discuss the types of audio lectures or other content they used online that was successful. Mary stated that the College’s technology instructional designers were great, but they lacked the content knowledge to be able to give discipline-specific feedback for her. She said instructional designers could help faculty embed videos online to Blackboard but could not provide feedback for faculty if such videos were great content for the course. She conveyed that for professional development, she would recommend a mentorship with an experienced faculty member. Mary stated, “it would be nice to have somebody that you can kind of check in with and see how they do it, see what things have worked for them in order improve the instructor’s experience and the student’s experience.” Mary also expressed the need for a course release time to be able to build and develop the online class would be very beneficial. She stated that it was difficult to create the online classes and teach at the same time. Having a course release of at least one class from the five courses full-time faculty are required to teach would allow the faculty to be able to dedicate the time to further develop their online classes.

Joe also very much agreed that the best way to help faculty with professional development was collaboration with other faculty to see what has worked best for them. He emphasized that frequent regular collaboration at the department level with fellow colleagues to see how their approach was to online teaching would be valuable to him. He suggested faculty should enroll in each others’ online classes to observe and learn from one another. Joe equated the online enrollment approach to classroom faculty

observation visits, and he stated he sees great value in the approach. This dual enrollment approach to professional development was not to be punitive in anyway but rather a collaborative approach towards learning from colleagues to be able to learn and emulate successful approaches and teaching methods. Joe believed that professional development for new faculty should be like a mentorship relationship with somebody who was really effective online. He specified that an experienced faculty member should enroll as a guest in a new online faculty member's class, and not in a supervisory way, but rather in a mentorship role to help give direction and feedback in the areas the faculty member was doing well in or might need further assistance.

Joe stated that developing a community of online teaching faculty and working together to collaborate on teaching would be the best approach to professional development, especially in a community within his own discipline. Joe voiced that the department should lead the way in terms of professional development by determining what kind of professional development their distance learning colleagues needed. He said, "Our colleagues should get together and say here is what we do well and here is what we could be doing better" in our online courses. Then the department can work with the instructional designers of the College to design and implement the needed tasks. The College should provide support, but initiatives and requirements should come from the department level and not the College. Janis also noted that the collaborative approach should perhaps be initiated at the department level in order to figure out how to translate the classroom to an online platform. This collaborative support and mentorship was a standout theme and many participants expressed that the department level should

spearhead this, and the College's administration should support by incentivizing this approach with course releases.

### **The Quality Matters Course Design Training**

Another theme that clearly emerged while conducting interviews with the faculty members was that all eight members mentioned Quality Matters in their discussion about professional development training in one context or another. In the semester prior to my research being conducted, participants stated that they had undergone a required Quality Matters course design professional development training by their College delivered to everyone who taught online courses, and they were required to get their course Quality Matters-certified. The first part of the training involved all members of the department's faculty who taught online classes to attend an eight hour long, full day of professional development training in order to understand the requirements of the Quality Matters certification. In the training, faculty went through various components with an instructional designer from the College who explained the steps.

Part two of the training involved each full-time faculty member to make an appointment with the instructional designer in charge of the Quality Matters training to discuss their course. The second part involved faculty members working with the instructional designers one-on-one to redesign their online Blackboard course into the course design template that met Quality Matters standards (Quality Matters, 2020). The instructional designers emailed a demo Blackboard design shell link to the faculty members to build their online course, according to the layout and standards set by Quality Matters. The faculty member and the instructional designer would meet, talk on the



phone, chat online, or email several times to get the final version of the online course set. Once the course was completed, the instructional designer of the College sent the course to be peer-reviewed and graded by a Quality Matters-certified peer-reviewer faculty (Quality Matters, 2020). Once the grading process was completed, the score was sent back to the faculty member, indicating whether the course had met the Quality Matters certification (Quality Matters, 2020).

The objective of the Quality Matters certification was for all the online courses to have a similar design and layout, so when students took online courses across disciplines there would be a consistent layout. For example, all students would see a button on Blackboard that said, “start here” and that would serve as the starting point for all online courses. A professor’s syllabus, mandatory online orientation, and other documents would always be contained under the “start here” folder so students would not be confused as to where to find the information. Quality Matters required faculty to structure their course into units or modules to help students understand the course work required and the due dates for completion (Quality Matters, 2020).

The faculty interviewed stated Quality Matters in several contexts throughout the interviews. First, all the participants brought up Quality Matters when asked if professional development provided at their institution was different now in contrast to when faculty first began teaching online. All eight participants interviewed stated, yes, and that was because of the Quality Matters training that they had just recently completed in the previous semester. Quality Matters was a different experience for them than when the faculty first starting teaching online courses. For the longest time, there was little-to-

no professional development training. Then a few years ago, the College implemented a four-hour training to understand some of the Blackboard dynamics. Then, a few years went by and nothing else was required until the Quality Matters course design training was implemented.

All eight participants interviewed also brought up Quality Matters training when responding to the questions of what type of professional development should be the minimum for faculty teaching online courses. Linda discussed Quality Matters, expressing that it was a good start to help students be able to navigate a course online, and a consistent course structure would help students figure out the requirements of the course and where to begin. Linda stated, “the more familiar you can make it, it will help make it easier for students to navigate through the process and part of college is being able to navigate.” She said this onboarding process with similar structures across a faculty’s online courses would help students find information quickly. Janis also felt Quality Matters should also be the minimum professional development requirement for all faculty teaching online. The Quality Matters course design training covered the technology skills instructors needed to know before teaching online. Quality Matters also helped the College streamline the course designs across disciplines, and ensured the Blackboard site met ADA accessibility requirements. Janis expressed that teaching online has “been like the wild west which is how we got ourselves in the position that we are in. It’s like everybody is for themselves...and it’s finally catching up to us.” Janis further stated that she is “delighted that there is a new minimum because previously there were no requirements at all, and a bunch of people who didn’t know how to use a

computer were teaching online classes...I am glad that we're instituting this new minimum.” She conveyed that even though Quality Matters was a bare minimum, it was better than before when there wasn’t much in terms of professional development for online teaching at the College.

Mary also brought up Quality Matters training and its helpfulness in making sure that the online content was organized for each instructor’s course and that the training not only addressed course design but also ADA accessibility. Many faculty were not aware that their Blackboard site was not ADA compliant. Quality Matters training explained and helped faculty understand for example, that their PowerPoint slides could not simply be posted onto Blackboard without some technical fixes to make them ADA compliant. Or a video could not be simply “linked” onto Blackboard but rather “embedded” with a title because ADA software screen readers needed a title to accompany the embedded video on Blackboard.

Sara also made the statement that Quality Matters should be at least the minimum professional development standard as well. She recognized that some faculty may express that anything that is a required professional development training was a “violation of their academic freedom.” However, she did not feel that this was the case for her. She understood Quality Matters was a good start in helping faculty match a learning objective with an assessment. The training she said helped faculty think about what they were teaching, how they were teaching it, and how they were assessing it. Sara was pleased that Quality Matters training helped her become more intentional with how she was teaching and how she was delivering content to her class online.

Chris also advocated that Quality Matters should be a minimum professional development standard for all faculty teaching online courses. Chris shared:

I keep going back to this Quality Matters because I think it's made somewhat of a difference as far as requirements. Because before the professors were pretty much left to themselves as far as what they did or didn't do in their course. So, it's a good attempt on the part of the College to create a minimum standard for those who teach online and to make it a requirement that if you're going to keep teaching online, you had to go to the training.

Chris was not completely satisfied with professional development training, but he expressed that Quality Matters was useful because it addressed the course design aspect of Blackboard. He believed that the uniformity it brought was beneficial to students, and that professors should have basic competencies in order to teach online courses.

### **Pedagogical Challenges of Teaching Adults to Teach Online**

Chris conveyed that Quality Matters did not address other pedagogical challenges of replicating online what was happening in the classroom, which led to the fourth theme of the pedagogical challenges of teaching adults to teach online. For example, he expressed having a difficult time being able to assess students' understanding in an online setting like he felt he could achieve in the classroom. He expressed that he received satisfaction from teaching in the classroom when he could see when the "light had turned on in a student's mind," so to speak. Or if students had an area of confusion, he said he could explain it to the student, but he could not gauge in an online setting if students understood the material in the same way he could gauge student understanding in the classroom. Joe also felt that connecting with students online on a personal level was a challenge that he needed more help on, and that pedagogy delivery would address such

challenges. Linda said that her biggest pedagogical challenge was with the online student assessment. Linda stated, “I would say that for me, the pedagogical challenge of being student-centered becomes a challenge just because you're physically not in the room with the student. That's the hardest part, and then you're doing twenty-five email exchanges” in order for the faculty and student to understand one another and make sure the information was conveyed accurately. Linda found it difficult to provide the same amount of feedback one-on-one in an online setting to students, whether it was through email exchanges or chats compared to in person in the classroom setting. Ethan also expressed these sentiments about students online by saying that the pedagogical challenges for him were lack of quality. He explained by saying, “if you get a lot of students in your class, which I do, it is difficult to respond personally to each one...there is not enough time to do all of that.” He voiced that online provided many benefits, but it was difficult to connect and answer questions for students and provide the kind of feedback that takes place in the classroom with all the students at once.

According to Robert, the biggest pedagogical challenge was translating a discipline like government that could be quite engaging in the classroom into an online environment where he felt it loses its charm and becomes boring. He stated:

I think there's an incredible challenge in taking a discipline like ours, which can be utterly fascinating in a classroom and then transferring that to a distance learning environment...We need to be taught ways to take the material and to make it engaging and challenging in a cold online asynchronous environment, in a way that we can share some of the fascination with the material that you would be able to do in a classroom. But it's pretty difficult to do in an online environment. I think that's where we need training.

When he first began teaching online courses, he received “no preparation” and “no professional development” whatsoever. He conveyed that is better now than when he first started teaching online but not much better. He stated that did not lack technical skills but expressed frustration over “translating” the classroom into the virtual world. Janis also mentioned that there was a pedagogical challenge in translating the classroom online. She declared, “I am good in the classroom, and I can go into the classroom, and I can explain a particular topic really well, but how do I do that in an online platform?” She wants to gain further knowledge of the ideas and possibilities that are out there about teaching in an online setting. She discussed her experience at a Blackboard professional development training she attended.

Sara noticed that part of the challenge that the College faced was “getting professors to embrace the notion that there are still things to learn.” She stated that professors needed to embrace the concept. Even though some faculty have a Ph.D., they should understand that they still have “things to learn about how to deliver an online class,” and faculty should not have the notion that just because they know “how a bill becomes law” does not mean they know enough about how to effectively deliver that knowledge and material in an online setting. Janis also agreed with Sara’s sentiments because she stated the she understood the College’s challenge of providing professional development because there had been resistance from professors “who did not really have an interest in raising the bar for online learning,” and they were okay with doing the “bare minimum for example, making students read the textbook and taking four exams” and that was it, thus not making the online learning meaningful. Though displeased with

the different aspects of professional development offered by the College, all eight participants interviewed expressed a willingness to continue to improve their online courses to provide a successful education to their students.

## **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the researcher described the steps to protect the confidentiality of each of the eight study participants, and then presented the demographic information for each of the participants that were gathered from a pre-interview survey and from face-to-face interviews. All the interviews were transcribed and manually coded for emergent themes. The research interviews helped provide insight into the perceptions of full-time community college faculty and their experiences teaching their discipline online. As a result of the data, the emergent themes that were revealed were beyond Blackboard: how faculty address asynchronous teaching and its limits, the urgent need for collaboration and content mentorship, the Quality Matters course design training, and the pedagogical challenges of teaching adults to teach online. The eight participants interviewed made recommendations and the next chapter will go over these research recommendations.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions**

This chapter provided an overview of the study, the discussion of the findings, limitations and delimitations, significance of the study, future research, and summary of the chapter.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

Change is inevitable, and online education was no exception, especially when it came to technology. According to Lederman (2019), “data showed that more than a third of all 2018 college and university students took at least one online course (para. 1). There doesn’t appear to be a slowing of this form of education among students. Lederman (2019) stated “the number of students taking at least one online course grew from 31.1 percent in 2016 to 33.1 percent in 2017 and 34.7 percent in 2018” (para. 6). As these numbers continued to increase, institutions of higher education needed to be prepared to offer more courses online in order to keep up with the demand. Professional development must be high priority in order for faculty “to create a quality online course and engaging learning experience for students” (Fish & Wickersham, 2009, p. 283).

The body of literature has indicated that professional development was needed, but there was a gap in the literature regarding the most effective way to prepare faculty to receive professional development for online courses in community colleges. In order to understand how best to help faculty prepare, the researcher conducted a study of eight full-time community college faculty at an urban college in Texas within the Government Department. The Government Department was picked because government courses are part of the Texas core curriculum, and every student was required to take the courses.



Therefore, the Government Department had a high number of students enrolled in their online courses, resulting in a number of faculty needed to teach those courses. The qualitative study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- I. What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses?
- II. What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses?
- III. What are community college faculty members' expectations for being ready to teach online classes?

Bandura's self-efficacy theory was the theoretical framework for this study (Bandura, 1986). This theory was appropriate for studying community college faculty's thoughts about professional development for online course instruction. The research design for this study consisted of a demographics survey, semi-structured interviews, and transcripts. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in order to understand the emergent themes. As a result of the study, the emergent themes that were revealed were beyond Blackboard: how faculty address asynchronous teaching and its limits, the urgent need for collaboration and content mentorship, the Quality Matters course design training, and the pedagogical challenges of teaching adults to teach online.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The three research questions were grounded in Bandura's social learning theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Through self-learning efficacy, participants in this study made judgments about their abilities to gain the skills they needed to develop their

online courses. Those with high efficacy sought out various professional development opportunities the College offered and built upon the knowledge gained. Other participants with low efficacy felt they needed more help and had not discovered many professional development offerings, or they felt they needed more training on a one-on-one basis. One participant articulated that if a faculty member was a “good hunter and gatherer” there are a number of professional development opportunities out there to help them. Bandura suggested “positive incentives foster performance accomplishments” (Bandura, 1982, p. 133). Course release time to gain professional development skills to build meaningful content in online courses was mentioned by the participants. Faculty needed incentives to motivate them to acquire new skills. Through the interpretation of the data, this study informed four findings related to faculty’s professional development experience as it related to online courses.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question of this study asked: What are the pedagogical and technical challenges faculty members experience in developing online courses? This question sought to understand the challenges faculty faced when developing and maintaining their online course.

#### ***Finding: Faculty recommended clear modeling of pedagogy with incentives for further training***

The previous professional development training faculty had received provided insight as to the type of further training they voiced they needed. The faculty expressed that the College had provided and continued to have many resources dedicated to the

technological front of developing online courses. Students at the community college accessed their online courses through the College's learning management system of Blackboard. All eight participants in the study were overwhelming positive about the instructional design trainers who provided the professional development at their College. According to the participants, the learning management system of Blackboard had gone through several updates, and it provided many technological capabilities to provide online instruction. All eight participants had sought out technical professional development training in the past and received adequate support because they expressed confidence in the Learning Management System of Blackboard the College utilized to deliver online courses. The participants emphasized that having technological skills was important for faculty teaching online courses, and that they still continued training and obtained information when they needed it. However, seven of the eight participants determined that at this stage of their teaching career, they have advanced past learning the basics of Blackboard, and they didn't need more Blackboard basic training. Hence, the faculty participants' experiences suggested that a more advanced skill set was needed on the technical front.

However, on the pedagogical front, the participants of the study communicated they needed more training and did not feel as confident as compared to the technical front. During the interviews, five participants conveyed that they had difficulty assessing student understanding in an online setting compared to the classroom where they could see a hand go up or a head nod. Connecting with students online was a challenge as well because it wasn't personal like the classroom. Helping faculty connect and engage with

the material in an online setting was a skill the participants mentioned they needed. Moreover, another area of development faculty stated they needed professional development was managing the time-consuming nature of providing one-on-one feedback for students. The participants voiced concerns about pedagogy were in line with the literature review.

Content development was another area expressed by seven of the eight participants they need more professional development training on. Having to translate a class, such as a government course, which can be very dynamic and fosters lots of classroom discussion, to an online setting was a major area faculty mentioned they struggled with when having to develop and teach their online courses.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question of this study asked: What are the elements of support faculty perceive they need to teach online courses? This question intended to address the areas that the faculty themselves identified they need more help with in order to be able to teach their online courses effectively.

#### ***Finding: Faculty need collaboration and mentorship with fellow colleagues***

The government faculty participants in this community college voiced that they needed content specialists or someone with extensive knowledge in their discipline to provide professional development content training. At this stage in their professional development, seven of the eight participants felt that they now needed help bridging the gap between the technical skills they had acquired with the pedagogical content help they needed for their online courses. For example, a faculty member stated that they knew

how to use Blackboard but they needed professional development to be able to teach the Electoral College system in an online sitting in way satisfactory to how they would teach it in the classroom setting. In order to be able to get effective help, the faculty mentioned they needed the technical instructional designers of the campus to have knowledge in this discipline. However, seven of the faculty participants recognized that this desire was not feasible for the College and suggested a more collaborative approach to learning and sharing from fellow colleagues who have taught online within the department and even with neighboring departments, such as history. A collaborative model would help faculty identify the best practice approaches other faculty have found successful. Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) found that “one-on-one development with a mentor or colleague was considered the most effective learning mode, closely followed by one-on-one interactions with an instructional designer” (p. 34). The challenge seemed to be that many faculty felt that their own online courses were not up to their satisfaction, so they themselves were seeking help from other instructors. However, it was difficult to collaborate because not many faculty believed their online courses were models to emulate.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question of this study asked: What are community college faculty members’ expectations for being ready to teach online classes? This question sought to understand faculty’s perceptions of the professional development training that should be the minimum for all faculty teaching online courses.

***Finding: Quality Matters training should be a minimum standard***

All eight community college faculty members in this study emphasized that their new professional development training on Quality Matters was at least a starting point for teaching an online course. According to the faculty, the obvious technical understanding of the learning management system of Blackboard was important to being able to teach online. The participants reiterated faculty should be proficient or participate in training to be up-to-speed with Blackboard, and there were plenty of offerings in the College to accomplish this skill set. However, the participants felt Quality Matters training took Blackboard knowledge a few steps further by layering it with course design and made sure the Blackboard materials were ADA compliant which they recommended should a minimum standard for all online faculty onboarding. Quality Matters streamlined the onboarding process when students signed into Blackboard and started the online course. One participant mentioned this onboarding process helped students navigate the College process better, so they didn't have to figure out how to navigate each online course they were taking and therefore helped with student retention. Faculty noted some frustrations with the training but overall agreed that the purpose was to have students navigate their online classes and helped faculty organize their Blackboard site where all the materials could easily be found and accessed. As a result, all eight participants recommended Quality Matters training, which built upon Blackboard training, should be a minimum standard for all faculty teaching online courses.

## **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

This study was a qualitative research study designed to understand the faculty professional development training needs in order to teach online courses. However, the results may not be applicable to all programs. The study participants were full-time faculty from the Government Department that had several years teaching experience with online courses at the community college. Government is a required course in order to obtain a bachelor's degree in the state of Texas and thus the focus was on that particular department. The study did not take into consideration other disciplines at the College. The study did not evaluate part-time adjunct faculty. The participants in the study varied by age, race, gender, the number of years teaching in the classroom, and the number of years teaching online. The researcher also acknowledged potential bias because the researcher is employed as a full-time faculty member at a community college, has taught online courses at two community colleges, and has undergone some professional development training. However, steps were taken to minimize bias and I found my knowledge of community college online teaching gave me greater access to faculty and made faculty comfortable sharing the challenges they personally felt.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study makes scholars and administrators more aware of the best practices in professional development training for faculty teaching and developing online courses. The four themes related to professional development helped fill in the gap in the literature regarding full-time faculty teaching online courses. The insights of the full-time faculty will be shared with the interview subjects and may be beneficial to them in understanding

areas of further professional development. As a result of this study, the community college online instructional designers could better understand the areas where faculty need more help and training to develop their course. Furthermore, department chairs and college administrators should be better able to tailor professional development training for the faculty who teach online course to meet faculty needs. If the results of the study were more broadly shared with faculty, instructional designers, and administrators, it may help grow the understanding of online community college instruction.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This qualitative study focused primarily on full-time faculty at an urban community college in the state of Texas. As a result, the researcher suggested four other ways in which future researchers could potentially add and expand this study.

First, future researchers could replicate this study within another discipline at an urban community college. The focus of this study was to look at the Government Department because the course was required and therefore a high-demand class and all students had to take the course, regardless of their major. Another concentrated discipline could help the researcher explore if there are similar patterns of need and frustration for faculty who teach required high-demand online courses.

Furthermore, future researchers could replicate the study at an urban community college but recruit faculty participants from across multiple disciplines at the College to discuss their professional development experiences with online courses. There are a number of colleges that were moving to offer their entire degrees online and therefore many trained faculty will be needed to teach online courses within their discipline. An



exploratory study could help the college understand how to scale professional development for faculty across disciplines.

In addition, the study could be replicated at a rural community college setting. This study focused on the professional development of full-time faculty at an urban community college. It would be interesting to see if faculty in rural community colleges are facing the same challenges or similar to faculty at an urban community college.

Moreover, future researchers could replicate this study with participants being adjunct faculty who taught online courses. This research focused solely on the full-time faculty experience. Some disciplines in community colleges do not allow adjunct faculty to teach online courses while others do. The experiences of adjunct faculty are important to study and their perceptions of professional development and time constraints are an area to explore. Adjunct faculty make up a significant number of the community college workforce, and their perceptions should be accounted for and be compared to full-time faculty in order to help professional development staff better understand their needs and tailor their services accordingly.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter included an overview of the study, which involved a qualitative study that examined eight full-time government community college professors at an urban community college in Texas about their professional development experiences in order to prepare and teach online courses. A pre-interview demographic survey was conducted and participants were selected for a semi-structured face-to-face interview that was recorded and transcribed. As a result of the study, the researcher was able to analyze

the data and present findings along four emergent themes. The themes included beyond Blackboard: how faculty address asynchronous teaching and its limits, the urgent need for collaboration and content mentorship, the Quality Matters course design training, and the pedagogical challenges of teaching adults to teach online. The researcher strove to answer the three research questions for the study with the discussion of the research findings. The three research findings included: faculty recommended clear modeling of pedagogy with incentives for further training, faculty need collaboration and mentorship with fellow colleagues, and Quality Matters training should be a minimum standard for all faculty teaching online courses. The study helped fill in the gap in the literature regarding full-time faculty teaching online courses and will make scholars and administrators more aware of the best practices in professional development training for faculty teaching and developing online courses at community colleges.

This experience of conducting research proved valuable to me as a researcher and I learned a lot about my own self-efficacy. This study solidified my commitment to improving my own professional development skills. It is my hope that these faculty participants' voices will continue to serve as a valuable resource for educators and administrators to help grow the understanding of online community college instruction.

## **Appendix A**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Title of the Project: Online Education and the Need for Professional Development Training for Online Faculty at Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Wajma Nasher, M.A., The University of Texas at Austin

Faculty Advisor: Norma V. Cantu, J.D., The University of Texas at Austin

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

#### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether or not to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

#### **What is the study about and why are we doing it?**

The purpose of the study is to examine faculty's perceptions about the professional development training they receive in order to successfully teach online courses.

#### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to:

- complete a demographic and teaching history survey and
- you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded

#### **How long will you be in this study and how long will it take?**

Participation in this study will include a one-time interview that will last approximately 90 minutes and the survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

#### **What risks and discomforts might you experience from being in this study?**

This is a minimal risk study. Participants are free not to answer any of the questions. Participants will be referred to the Community College counseling services center if they were to experience any issues.

### **How could you benefit from this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, participants may enjoy the time reflecting on their experiences and gaining a better understanding of their teaching experience.

### **What data will we collect from you?**

As part of this study, I will collect responses to interview questions about online teaching and professional development through audio recording and a two-page information survey about the participants. Audio recordings will be transcribed but will not contain any participant identifiers, keeping your identity anonymous.

### **How will we protect your information?**

The researcher will comply with privacy and anonymity rules by assigning pseudonyms for participants on all documentation to protect the participants' identities. The collection of all data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked home office of the researcher where no one will have access.

### **What will happen to the information we collect about you after the study is over?**

The stored data will be kept for the purpose of the research and will be destroyed upon completion of the study, which includes the destruction of the audio recordings.

### **How will we compensate you for being part of the study?**

Participants will not receive monetary compensation for participating.

### **Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary**

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin or the Community College. You will not lose any benefits or rights you already had if you decide not to participate. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

### **Contact Information for the Study**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Wajma Nasher

### **Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board

Phone: 512-232-1543

Email: [irb@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:irb@austin.utexas.edu)

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the principal investigator using the information provided above.

*I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.*

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Printed Subject Name

---

Signature

---

Date

## Appendix B

### Pre-Interview Survey

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand community college faculty members' perception of the professional development training they get in order to be able to teach online courses. All of the participants will be required to sign an informed consent form in advance. As indicated in the Informed Consent form, your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any questions on this form. The researcher will comply with privacy and anonymity rules by assigning pseudonyms for participants on all documentation to protect the participants' identities. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked home office of the researcher where no one will have access. The stored data will be kept for the purpose of the research and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participant Identifier (researcher use only, *pseudonyms will be assigned*): \_\_\_\_\_

1) Sex

☐ Female

☐ Male

2) Age:

☐ 20 – 35

☐ 36 – 45

☐ 46 - 55

☐ 56 – 65

☐ 66 – 75

☐ 76 – 85

☐ 86 +

3) Race: \_\_\_\_\_

4) Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

5) Faculty Title:

☐ Assistant Professor

☐ Associate Professor

☐ Professor

6) Educational Level

☐ Masters

☐ Doctoral

7) How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

8) Do you teach online courses?

☐ Yes

☐ No

9) If yes to number 8, how many years have you been teaching online courses?

\_\_\_\_\_

10) If yes to number 8, in the last three years how many online courses have you taught?

\_\_\_\_\_

11) Which subjects do you teach online?

☐ U.S. Government

☐ Texas State and Local Government

☐ Both

12) What type of pedagogy instruction have you received in your teaching career?  
(Please Explain)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13) How prepared do you see yourself to teach online courses?

☐ Very Unprepared

☐ Unprepared

☐ Neutral

☐ Prepared

☐ Very Prepared

14) How satisfied are you with the professional development training you have received to develop your online courses?

☐ Very Unsatisfied

☐ Unsatisfied

☐ Neutral

☐ Satisfied

☐ Very Satisfied

15) In what areas of professional development training have you participated?  
(check all that apply)

- ☐ Course Design
- ☐ Course Content
- ☐ Pedagogy
- ☐ Blackboard
- ☐ Video Training
- ☐ Microsoft PowerPoint
- ☐ Prepackaged Online Curriculum
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Background**

1. Please describe your professional experiences as a professor.
  - a. How long have you been teaching?
  - b. At what types of educational institutions have you taught?
  - c. Where they located in an urban, suburban, or rural region?
2. What led you to teach at a community college?
3. Could you tell me about your experience teaching distance-learning classes?
  - a. What does it mean, to you, to teach distance-learning classes?
  - b. How long have you done so?
  - c. How many online classes do you teach in a given semester or academic year?
  - d. How does your institution classify the different types of distance learning classes? (For example: 100% online, some in which you have to go to the testing centers, etc.)
  - e. What format do you prefer to teach with of the different types of distance learning formats?

#### **Professional Development**

4. What does professional development mean for you?
  - a. How often do you go through professional development training?
5. How do you perceive the professional development that your institution has provided to teach distance-learning classes?
  - a. Is the professional development different now in contrast to when you first began teaching online? If so, in what ways do you perceive it to be different?
6. What would you say has been the focus of the professional development offerings that your institution has provided?
  - a. Could you give examples that might better illustrate your assessment of the professional development offerings?
7. How do you feel about the challenges of teaching distance learning classes?
  - a. What pedagogy challenges have you experienced? (Please give examples)
  - b. What technical challenges have you experienced? (Please give examples)
8. What type of professional development do you feel you need more of in order to successfully teach online both now and in the future? Why do you feel that way?
9. What type of professional development do you feel you need less of in order to successfully teach online both now and in the future? Why do you feel that way?
10. What type of professional development would you say should be the standard for all faculty teaching online? Why do you feel this way?

- a. Do you feel that your institution offers this standard? Why do you feel this way?
- 11. What type of professional development would you say should be a minimum for all faculty teaching online? Why do you feel this way?
  - a. Do you feel that your institution offers this type of professional development as a minimum? Why do you feel this way?
- 12. Based on your experiences, how can community college academic and instructional design departments better prepare faculty members like you who teach online courses?
- 13. Is there something else I should have asked regarding our discussion today?
- 14. Would you like to share any additional information or thoughts on your preparation for teaching online courses?

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